DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 331 620 PS 019 462

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TITLE Family Day Care in Denmark: A Model to be Emulated.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Caregivers; Early Childhood Education; *Educational Improvement; *Family Day Care; *Federal Regulation; Foreign Countries; Models; *Social Responsibility; Standards; Supervisors
IDENTIFIERS *Denmark; Parent Caregiver Relationship; Supervisor Supervisee Relationsihp

ABSTRACT

This report describing family day care in Denmark is based on discussions with early childhood professionals in Denmark. Regulations for conducting family day care are set out in national guidelines which focus on: (1) supervision of children and providers by a trained child care professional who oversees not more than 50 children; (2) selection of homes; (3) responsibilities of providers; (4) providers' pay and sources of funding for pay; and (5) providers' training. Functional aspects of successful family day care are also described. These include the teaming of providers, supervisor visits, the allowed limit of five children per home, and the political and social context of day care. Implications of the Danish system for the United States are drawn. Sustained efforts to improve family day care in the United States should include increasing registration standards, developing funding, encouraging certification, and supporting supervised systems. (BC)

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Family Day Care in Denmark: A Model to be Emulated

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Abstract

The report describes family day care in Denmark based on discussions with early childhood professionals in Denmark. The rules for conducting family day care are set out in national guidelines. For example, each community which sponsors family day care as a child care option must hire an early childhood professional to monitor each 50 children in family day care. Other rules and guidelines are explained. Good guidelines do not guarantee smooth operations. Functional aspects of successful family day care also are described.

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Family Day Care in Denmark: A Model to be Emulated

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During my sabbatic leave in the 1985/86 academic year I made two visits to Denmark to study various types of programs for infants and toddlers. My choice of Denmark as a place to observe programs for young children had been inspired by Wagner and Wagner's (1976) description of the Danish child care system. One of the programs I learned about was family day care. I was impressed by the degree to which the Danish supervised family day care system provided for the welfare of young children and provided support to both the family day care providers and the parents. My purpose in describing the Danish system is to describe what, in my opinion, is high quality family day care and to encourage more systematic attention to the conditions of family day care in the United States.

In Denmark family day care is locally controlled but conducted according to a set of national guidelines. My understanding of family day care in Denmark comes primarily from discussions with two family day care supervisors while in Denmark and the subsequent translation of the national guidelines by Rita Kramer, a native of Denmark. One of the family day care supervisors was Vibs Neessen in the Fladsa community. Fladsa is a community of about 7,000 people who live in thirty-six villages in a rural area two hours by train from Copenhagen. The family day care system in Fladsa involved 150 children who were placed in forty-two homes. The other supervisor was Jorgen Lauridesen who was in charge of the family day care system in the city of Aarhus. The family day care system in Aarhus was a large system that involved more than 700 homes and more than 2,500 children.

The Danish family day care system will be described first in terms of the general system characteristics as outlined in the regulations and second

in terms of the operational aspects of successful systems.

FAMILY DAY CARE REGULATIONS

Supervision of family day care children/providers.

A key element in the family day care system is the family day care supervisor. Family day care supervisors are employed by the individual communities as part of their social service staff. The supervisor must be a trained child care professional. The minimum degree of training required is a three year course of study focused on theoretical and practical issues associated with young children and their care. The family day care regulations specify the responsibilities of the family day care supervisors to children, to providers and to parents.

The regulations specify that each family day care supervisor have a caseload of not more than 50 children. The supervisor is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the development of the 50 children which includes such things as making sure that the children have expected medical and dental exams and care. To monitor the children's development the supervisor must visit each child in the family day care home at least twice a month. When a child within her caseload needs special attention for developmental issues, the supervisor is to facilitate obtaining the special services.

The family day care supervisor provides support to the family day care providers. The family day care supervisor has the right to visit a provider at any time but the regulations specify that at least two visits to each provider be made each month. The supervisor visits the homes to monitor children's development and to provide assistance to the providers. The regulations also specify that the supervisors must be available to the providers by phone for two hours each morning.

The family day care supervisor has responsibilities to parents. The supervisor interviews parents seeking care and arranges placements in view of

parent/child needs and available placements. The regulations state that supervisors must hold two meetings a year with the parents and the parents must receive notification of these meetings in writing. Supervisors are available to parents to discuss child development concerns and child care concerns. When necessary from the providers and/or parents point of view, the supervisor mediates between parents and providers.

Number of Children

The regulations state that each home may care for five children. However, when all the children in care are under school age, the regulations recommended that the number be kept at four.

Selection of Homes and Mothers.

The family day care regulations are not specific with respect to requirements of either the homes or the family day care mothers. Instead, the regulations specify the process by which selection of homes and providers should be made, specify who has the responsibility for deciding, and give some general guidelines about types of things to examine. The approval of the family day care provider is the responsibility of the social service office in the community. This office solicits the advice of the family day care supervisor in making the decision on approval. The family day care supervisor interviews the potential provider, checks with the social service office for what is known about the family, and makes a home visit. The home visit is to assess both the physical aspects of the home and the psychosocial aspects of the family. All family members must have a medical exam and be free of illness.

Responsibilities of Day Care Providers

The regulations contain some general and some specific expectations for the family day care provider. For example, family day care providers are not allowed to use physical punishment with the children and must use appropriate

language in their presence. Providers must keep attendance records and turn them in periodically. To be part of the system the provider must be willing to accept children from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and has the option of refusing to care for children who need care outside of this time period. The family day care providers are responsible for providing the food for the meals that the children have in their home. Also, while one part of the house may be set up as the primary play area for the children, the children must have use of the entire house.

Pay of Family Day Care Providers

The family day care providers have a union. Every two years the union leaders negotiate with representatives of the Council of Municipalities. In 1986 the providers were paid about $236 per month for each child in full time care. In order that family day care providers have an income which was reasonable and predictable, each municipality had to guarantee that 75% of their providers were paid on the basis of having three full-time children even if those providers were not in fact providing care for that many children. Thus, 75% of the family day care providers in a given community could count on receiving at least $708 per month. Providers who cared for four children received $944 per month, and those who cared for five children received $1180. To gain some perspective on this pay the monthly figures can be compared to $930 earned by a minimum wage worker, $1000 earned by an untrained child care worker in a center, and $1300 earned by a trained worker in a center.

In addition to direct pay the family day care provider is supplied with equipment, consumable play materials, and liability insurance. Family day care providers are considered to have a job equivalent to a person working in a child care center. Providers are covered by something equivalent to workman's compensation, have sick leave and five weeks of paid vacation, and

are given paid release time for training. Since medical coverage and retirement pensions are national programs to which everyone belongs and contributes through taxes, this type of coverage is not needed. In addition, family day care providers are not taxed on 1/3 of their income in consideration of the costs of food, food preparation, heat and light, and general wear and tear associated with the care of children.

How is it Paid For ?

As with other types of child care in Denmark, the costs for family day care are shared among parents, municipalities, and the state. In 1985-86 the parents were legally responsible for 35% of the cost of wages and program supplies, and the government covered the remaining 65%. In 1985/86 the government's share of expenses was equally divided by federal and local government. Since that time the federal government has adopted something similar to block grants but the general principle of cost sharing between parents, federal government and local government remains. Parent fees for family day care ranged from about $70 to about $110 per month.

The parent fees also could be subsidized. There was a national sliding scale for parent fees based on family size and income. The general characteristics of the scale were as follow: Parents with family income above $13,500 paid the full parent share while those with family incomes below $4,000 paid nothing. Between those two points parents paid between 5% and 99% of the parent fee.

Training of Family Day Care Mothers

In addition to the ongoing inservice training provided by the family day care supervisors, there is a well developed series of short courses for family day care providers. While training is not required by law, it is strongly encouraged and almost all providers take training. Training packages include a two day introductory course explaining the system rules

and expectations, week long courses on topics such as growth and development and activities for children in the family day care setting, and one day courses covering issues such as child nutrition and how to lift children.

OPERATIONAL ASPECTS OF SUCCESSFUL FAMILY DAY CARE

The family day care regulations provide an important framework within which local communities can set up family day care systems. However, even a good set of regulations cannot ensure that the family day care system will work well in a particular community. In the 276 communities in Denmark some family day care systems worked well while in others there were numerous problems. Vibs Neessen in the Fladsa community had a very successful family day care system and had worked with other communities who were having problems. From my conversation with her I learned about some of the reasons why her system worked so well and why some of the systems with which she consulted were not working so well.

For Vibs the secret of successful family day care was to provide the means by which the family day care providers could feel self-respect, a feeling of importance for the work they were doing, and a sense of responsibility for doing the job well. The supervisors are responsible for establishing the conditions whereby the family day care providers feel responsible and have high self esteem.

Teaming of Day Care Providers

One of the stresses on family day care providers is the degree of isolation from other adults. While contact with the family day care supervisor helps to alleviate the isolation and provides some stimulation to the provider, developing links among the providers themselves also strengthens the system. In Fladsa and Aarhus the family day care providers were put into groups of 6 to 8. These groups usually met once a week at night. The meetings provided the opportunity to share ideas, to ask for and

offer help, to plan joint activities, and to arrange for aspects of the program like coverage of children during vacations. The supervisors did not attend all these meetings but did so on request.

Certain practices had been adopted to encourage the teaming concept. For example, rather than give each individual provider a budget for equipment and field trips, groups of providers were allocated a certain amount of money. In Fladsa each group of providers had a budget of approximately $1,000. New toys, learning materials, and consumable supplies also were given to the groups rather than individuals. Equipment and learning materials were exchanged among providers during these meetings.

Nature of Supervisor Visit

The regulations state that each provider should be visited two times a month but does not say how these visits should be conducted nor how long the visits should be. Vibs told me that in some communities visits were done in a very cursory fashion and did not involve a meaningful exchange between provider and supervisor. In Vibs' system the visit was structured to be for about 90 minutes and involved a period of play and observation of children and a period for discussion with the provider.

More important to the success of a family day care system than the amount of time spent visiting is the nature of the relationship established between the supervisor and the provider. As with any supervisory relationship the relationship between family day care provider and supervisor works best when the relationship involves mutual respect and trust.

Number of Children in Homes

The family day care regulations allowed up to five children in the family day care home. However, in Vibs' experience, it was the unusual provider who could manage five children successfully. Some of the systems with which she consulted were in trouble because too many of the homes had

five children. This created conditions which stressed providers and upset parents. In Fladsa and Aarhus the average number of children per home was 3.5. New providers cared for no more than three children and took in a fourth child only after successfully handling three. Only a few exceptionally capable providers cared for five children. When the majority of homes in the system cared for three or four children, the system was flexible and could absorb extra children to cover provider illness, vacation, and training.

Dedication and Political Savvy

Family day care systems function in a complex of community services and pressures. Each community had limited resources to spend on social service programs and family day care was one of many programs competing for the resources. Also, there was high demand for child care in Denmark and the parents' need for child care resulted in political pressure to provide that care. But to provide more care might involve employing people who were not qualified to provide care and/or might involve having most providers caring for the maximum number of children. Neither was desireable. And because the amount of money providers made depended upon the number of children cared for, providers often pressured supervisors to give them more children. Supervisors had to balance what was good for children against the needs of providers and the community. In well-functioning family day care systems the supervisors stood strongly for what they believed to be best for children and were able to resist the political pressures from parents, political leaders, and providers. It takes strong leadership to maintain a healthy family day care system.

In Denmark, as in any country, family day care functions within a background context of assumptions about children, child care, and social responsibility toward children--the macrosystem environmental context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In Denmark there is an acceptance of the social

responsibility for the well-being of children. Children are considered not only future citizens but present citizens deserving of full protection in their own right. One aspect of that protection involves systematic and meaningful monitoring and support of the environments in which children are being raised. There is a commitment to making conditions equally good in all rearing environments. The supervised family day care system described above represents the Danish execution of social responsibility to children in the family day care environment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

In the United States there are many people who agree that children are full citizens in their own right and many who believe that nonparental rearing environments, such as family day care, should be monitored and supported by early childhood professionals. However, from a child development point of view, the current execution of social responsibility to children in family day care is very minimal. Most family day care seems to occur outside of any system of registration. States either do not register family day care or don't put much effort into enforcement. Even when states have registration requirements, the requirements are minimal and do not involve regulation of issues known to be important (Young and Zigler, 1986). For example, only five states mention anything about training in child development. Additionally, Eheart & Leavitt (1986) found that even though only one third of registered family day care providers had any training there was very little interest in obtaining training. The high turnover rate of family day care providers is another major concern from the point of view of stability in the lives of young children (Modigliani, 1986).

There are many things about the Danish system which are appealing. The most important aspect is the systematic involvement of trained early childhood professionals with caseloads which allow meaningful involvement.

The supervised family day care model involves issues of finance, liability, employer-employee relations, worker benefits, professionalism and child advocay. Many philosophical and political issues would have to be addressed before any large scale adoption of supervised family day care could be adopted in the United States.

Even though there is little chance that supervised family day care will become the U. S. model of family day care in any forseeable future, the model of supervised family day care can be adopted and adapted to create family day care of high quality in many individual communities. Also the supervised model could be adopted as a model for training independent family day care providers and/or a model to credential family day care providers.(See the National Credentialing Program-Family Day Care Providers).

An improvement in the conditions of family day care in the United States will involve long term objectives and sustained effort on several fronts. Corsini, Wisensale, and Caruso (1988) have described the many aspects of family day care with illustration of where policy initiatives can occur. Within the States, and with encouragement at the Federal level, sustained efforts should be undertaken to:

1. Increase the degree to which family day care providers are registered.
2. Increase the standards for registration.
3. Develop and sustain funding for family day care training.
4. Develop and sustain programs to support family day care providers such as provided by newsletters, hot and warm lines, provider associations and state conferences.
5. Encourage family day care providers to become certified through the Child Development Associate National Credentialing Program. Provide money to support professionals to assist in the credentialling

process.

6. Encourage support of supervised systems of family day care as described in this paper.

Supervised family day care does exist in isolated settings within the United States. Employing a trained early childhood professional to monitor a reasonable number of children and providers can be done by a private sector employer or a public sector social service agency. Conducting a supervised family day care system could in itself be a small business. A supervised family day care system also could be sponsored by a school system as an aspect of the involvement of schools in the total child care situation as advocated by Zigler (Trotter, 1987).

A large part of the task for creating supervised family day care systems is solving the economic problems of reasonable pay to providers, reasonable costs to parents, support for supervisors' pay, and the integration of funds from various sources. For a more systematic analysis of the costs of supervised family day care systems as described here and ideas for creating such systems, see Corsini & Caruso (1988). A meaningful commitment to our young children in the 1980's and 1990's must include a meaningful response to the social reality of family day care in the United States. These children are our future.

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